



**Appropriations Committee Public Hearing  
February 10, 2016**

Department of Housing Budget  
Public housing PILOT and Low-Income Housing Tax Abatement Programs

Testimony of Florence Villano, Executive Director

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this evening. My name is Florence Villano, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Housing Coalition. The Connecticut Housing Coalition represents a wide-ranging, vibrant network of community-based affordable housing activity across the state. Our more than 250 member organizations include nonprofit developers, human service agencies, resident associations, and diverse other housing practitioners and advocates. Founded in 1981, the Coalition's mission is to expand housing opportunity and to increase the quantity and quality of affordable housing in Connecticut.

I would like to speak with you this evening about the Department of Housing (DOH) Budget. The Coalition enjoys a positive working relationship with the Department. We find the staff to be knowledgeable of and receptive to the affordable housing needs of the state. DOH is moving Connecticut forward in the "catch-up" process that must happen after affordable housing was ignored for so long. However, we are very concerned with the consolidation of agency programs into one block grant. The result of such action would remove the Legislative branch from the decision-making process, eliminate the efficacy of the public hearing process in which the public gets to express their views, reduces transparency on the decision-making as to how money is to be spent, can potentially compromise program viability should agency priorities shift and finally impacts service providers who need to know what the government's commitment is from year to year in order to run their programs. Should this kind of budgeting prevail I cannot speak to the kind of relationship it will lead to as the priorities of the Department may not remain in line with those they have today.

You have already received testimony this evening from two of our resident leaders and PHRN Board members about the valuable work PHRN does with public housing residents. As you know, PHRN is a major initiative operating out of the Coalition. Its main purpose is to educate public housing residents about their rights and assist them in forming resident associations. Residents who know their rights and responsibilities as tenants are better able to participate fully with PHA's efforts to address residents' needs and to contribute in a positive way to the management of their homes in line with CSG 8-64c the law you passed with great foresight in 2011. I urge you to preserve the funding for this program which is of great value to Connecticut's low-income residents.

Finally, though it does not appear in this budget, I also want to note that both PILOT and Tax Abatement were affected by the deficit mitigation bill passed in December and the authorization given to the Governor in June. We are very grateful for the partial remedy that the Governor has included in his budget and we will continue to work with the Housing Committee to address this issue as the impact of dramatically increased rents on residents who are already paying well beyond 30 percent of their incomes cannot be overstated.

Thank you for your time and consideration.